

COLLABORATIVE



VISIONS

Two artists put their talents and their collections into a loft that combines a contemporary aesthetic with far-flung tastes

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This page: A bronze sculpture by Brad Davis (with a ceramic base by Brad Miller) depicts a juniper tree. Cloisonné vessels complete the still life. Opposite: The living room demonstrates a sophisticated pairing of classical Chinese furniture, modernist sofas, and a 1950s kidney-shaped coffee table from Lane. The large painting, by Davis, is entitled *Dogs Fishing*. The carpet is Wood Grain from Fort Street Studio.

A 5,000-SQUARE-FOOT LOFT in downtown Manhattan is the current refuge of the artists Brad Davis and Janis Provisor. It's an idiosyncratic home that reflects the evolving panorama of their life together: This is a couple that can't seem to rest without improving on, adding to, modifying, or totally transforming their immediate surroundings. Here, Gio Ponti meets Shanxi (that would be 18th-century Shanxi furniture from northern China); midcentury classics—Eames, Noguchi, and Nelson—harmonize with German Art Deco pottery; “Literati,” Chinese landscape-style paintings, converse with works by Alex Katz and Chuck Close. And then there are wild silk carpets of the couple's own design, a calligraphy collection, dozens of teapots, and an American art pottery collection from the 1920s.

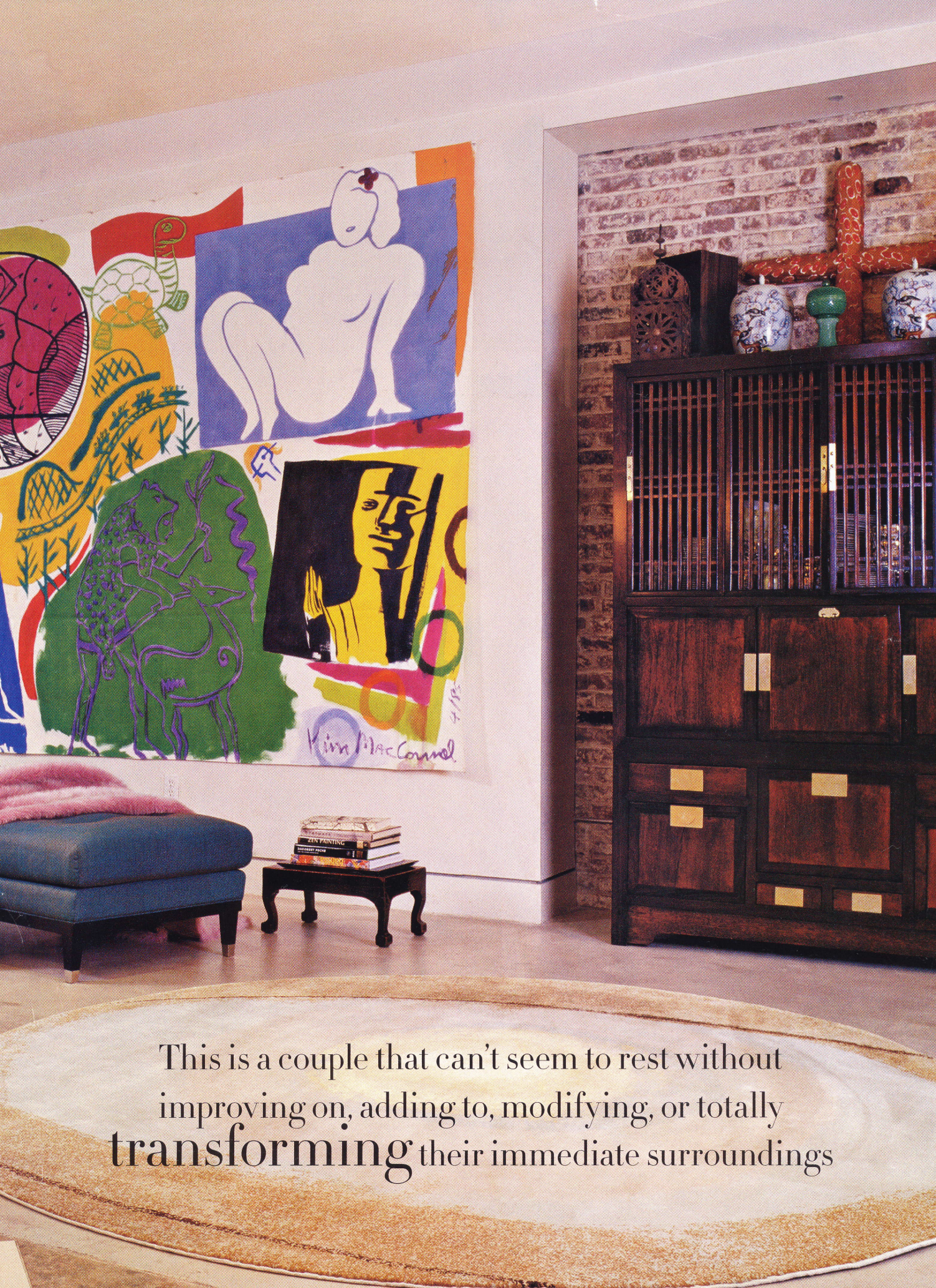
Both Provisor and Davis are esteemed painters who were represented by the legendary Holly Solomon Gallery, a leader of the cutting-edge contemporary art scene in New York during the 1970s. In fact, the gallery's first show was of work by Davis, who was one of the original artists of the pattern and decoration movement.

Since Davis and Provisor married in 1983, they have collaborated on bone china, furniture, and—in conjunction with architect Harry Teague—have even designed a house together (it won an AIA award in Colorado in 1986), in addition to their individual work with painting, jewelry, printmaking, and sculpture.

It was a sabbatical from New York City in 1993, however, that gave rise to the most recent chapter in their careers—becoming carpet designers. “We were going for one year, to paint, travel, and explore China,” recalls Provisor. One year turned into nine, and

The center of the loft is vibrant, yet serene. The chaise longue was bought in Hong Kong and is covered in a Jim Thompson silk. The large painting is by Kim McConnell, circa 1980. Area rug is Orbit by Fleet Street Studio. The 19th-century lacquered cabinet was made in Tianjin, China.





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Clockwise from top left: In the kitchen, an Isamu Noguchi table and a George Nelson lamp are minimal notes against an extensive ceramic collection. Bone china made by Janis Provisor and Brad Davis. A Nelson chest topped by a 17th-century architectural fragment stands near the entry. Opposite, top: Gio Ponti chairs around a steel-and-glass table designed by the couple, in the dining room. Painting above Florence Knoll credenza is *Daddy's Girl* by Provisor. Part of a glass collection that includes 1950s Orrefors, 1960s Murano, and contemporary Swedish art glass.



around the time their young son Alec was beginning first grade in Hangzhou, where they were living, Davis asked Provisor if she wanted to collaborate on making a silk carpet. Sure, she thought, why not add another artistic dimension to their oeuvre?

Using their bedroom as a studio—with a huge piece of plywood atop two desks—they designed a carpet that would be painterly, yet more than that. Their intent was to create a piece that would work with other objects in a room, not simply function as artwork for the floor.

“Artists are problem solvers, and this certainly required a different way of thinking,” says Davis. “As we didn’t know the limitations of the medium, or refused to be bound by them, we had the freedom to create something new.”

It took several years of trial and error, working with a local weaver in a small village near Hangzhou, to translate their vision into a carpet that met their stringent criteria. Today, these carpets continue to be made in a traditional manner in China for their company, Fort Street Studio.

By the time they decided to return to New York two years ago they had amassed an extraordinary assortment of objects, furniture, and art—enough off-beat discoveries to fill a 40-foot container. (When they left for China, they took just three suitcases and a box of art supplies.)

Their loft, in a classic all-brick former industrial building, is the length of one city block, spanning nearly 200 feet, but is only 26 feet wide. Natural light comes mostly from windows on the two end walls, so the interior sections are utilized for bedrooms, bathrooms, and a library. At the back of the loft, a painting studio makes use of the light coming in from the rear.

With the exception of the bedrooms, which are private rooms with walls, the loft is a series of spaces, each open and flowing into the next. The living room,





an expression of the couples' distinctive style, takes advantage of southern light through the front windows. Two sofas of Davis's design are sleek, low, and comfortable. "I wanted them to look vaguely European, and somewhat 1950s in flavor—residential looking, but not rigid," he says. They were made in Hong Kong, where the couple were then living, by an upholsterer they discovered in an outdoor street market. Juxtaposed with the modernity of the sofas are several small Shanxi footstools and cabriole-legged tables. The carpet's abstract pattern is luminous, with ribbons of burgundy and a subtle gray-green shimmer.

Guest sleeping quarters are perhaps the most unexpected, filled with a 19th-century wedding bed that is covered with a dupioni silk quilt of their own design. Throughout, the vibrancy of the couples' collections, assembled in fascinating ways, more than makes up for the lack of natural light. At every opportunity—even inside cabinets—artistic objects create a tableau for the eye to rest upon. It's an Asian aesthetic that suggests a particular approach to life.

The master bedroom is a subdued retreat, with low lighting provided by 1940s ceramic lamps and an unusual floor lamp attributed to Russel Wright, with leaves embedded in its parchment shade. The bed is draped with one of Provisor's beloved pieces of Scalamandrè silk from the 1950s, made into a bedspread. Finally, the floor is covered with one of their silk carpets, its palette a delicate mix of hues—taupe, cherry red, olive green, pale blue, and white—all coalescing to create a tranquil place for dreams. ●



Left: The master bedroom is a quirky mix of rustic and modern, with both Chinese and American objects, furniture, and art. The carpet is Amorphous from Fort Street Studio. Opposite and above: A 19th-century carved mahogany Chinese wedding bed. The bed has inlays of lacquer and mother-of-pearl.